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DEPT FOR ALL NEAR EAST COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [PA](#) [SU](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: NEA A/S WELCH'S MARCH 14 MEETING WITH FM BEDJAOUI

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman,  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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11. (C) In their March 14 meeting, A/S Welch told FM Bedjaoui we would welcome his visiting Washington in April; expressed U.S. concerns about Sudan and urged Arab League support for bringing African Union forces in Darfur under a UN umbrella; and hoped Algeria would press Hamas to recognize Israel, reject violence, and accept previous PA commitments. Noting the United States would shortly announce an increased humanitarian aid package to the Palestinian people, he urged that any Algerian aid be directed toward the Palestinian people and not to Hamas. FM Bedjaoui said President Bouteflika had expressed satisfaction to him about his meetings earlier in the day with A/S Welch. He said he looked forward to visiting Washington in April, at a time when Congress would not be on recess; praised the balanced U.S. response to the controversial Danish cartoons (portraying Prophet Mohammed as a terrorist); and, while signaling Algerian support for a UN logistical role in Sudan and for bringing African Union forces under a UN umbrella, said it would be difficult to prevent Sudan from assuming the Arab League presidency. On Hamas, Bedjaoui said the organization would have to accept current realities and U.S./Quartet conditions, though this would take time and pressure needed to be exerted on Israel in order to overcome its intransigence, which was a source of despair for the Palestinians. A/S Welch said he had been encouraged by President Bouteflika's hope that this year's Arab League summit in Khartoum -- unlike the 1967 summit that produced the famous "three no's" -- would this time say "yes, yes, yes" to peace with Israel. (End Summary)

LOOKING FORWARD TO BEDJAOUI'S VISIT TO U.S.  
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12. (C) In a March 14 meeting accompanied by Ambassador and PolEcon Chief, NEA A/S Welch extended greetings from Secretary Rice and told FM Bedjaoui we would welcome his

SIPDIS

visit to Washington this April. Noting that Bedjaoui wanted to travel to the U.S. in conjunction with a visit to Brazil (and post has since learned Argentina), the A/S encouraged Bedjaoui to avoid coming to Washington during the April Congressional recess and offered to help set up meetings at State, the NSC and elsewhere. Bedjaoui thanked Welch for his offer of assistance, noting he looked forward to going to Washington and would keep in mind the Congressional recess. Bedjaoui then commented that President Bouteflika, with whom

he had just been meeting, had been pleased with the meeting he had had earlier in the day with A/S Welch. Welch responded by remarking that the President was a man of stature whose advice he respected and whose experience was of great value.

#### NATO SUPPORT ROLE IN SUDAN NOT A CONCERN FOR ALGERIA

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¶3. (C) Signaling U.S. interest in a positive outcome on the Sudan at the upcoming Arab League Summit, A/S Welch asked Bedjaoui if he would be attending. Bedjaoui said he was currently scheduled to be in Beijing at that time, but his visit might be canceled to allow his participation in Khartoum. Bedjaoui said he understood the U.S. position against Sudan's assuming the presidency of the Arab League, adding that the GOA "had not yet fully taken stock of that (issue) as a government." That said, the Arab League presidency was unlike that of the African Union, since the presidency of the former rotated by alphabetical order. Welch said that we were unhappy with Sudan because it was not sufficiently contributing to a positive resolution of the situation in Darfur. With respect to the rehatting of the AMIS, the plan was not for the UN to replace the AU. Rather, the idea was to put the force on a more stable financial footing by putting it under a UN umbrella and attracting other troop contributions. It was increasingly difficult for others, including the U.S., to fund the force on the basis of voluntary contributions. The role envisaged for NATO, added Welch, was solely logistical. Sudanese leaders should not be allowed to use this limited NATO support role to complicate the handover. Bedjaoui commented that NATO was always a sensitive subject in the area. However, he fully understood the intent and assured Welch that the NATO role in Sudan was not of concern to Algeria.

#### APPRECIATION FOR U.S. STAND ON DANISH CARTOONS

ALGIERS 00000502 002 OF 003

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¶4. (C) Bedjaoui, changing the subject, said the Algerians appreciated the U.S. position and statements on the recent Danish cartoons that had so angered the Muslim world. Noting he had been on an official visit to Denmark when the cartoons were first published, Bedjaoui remarked that at the time he had a bad feeling about the future course of events. At a dinner with ten Muslim Ambassadors to Denmark, the cartoons had been a main point of discussion, and he had suggested that the Ambassadors explain to the Prime Minister why the cartoons were offensive to Muslims. Bedjaoui told Welch a few words from the Prime Minister at the time would have "put out the fire." Unfortunately, the Prime Minister did not agree to meet with the Ambassadors; they sent reports to their capitals reflecting this; and the situation subsequently escalated. Bedjaoui also expressed appreciation for the role of the British. Jack Straw had helped calm reaction during his February visit to Algiers by joining Bedjaoui on a visit to a mosque. The Foreign Minister then told Welch, "I thank you (the United States) for your moderating influence."

¶5. (C) Welch said he very much appreciated Bedjaoui's remarks and would pass his comments to the White House. President Bush, noted Welch, strongly supported the balanced message the U.S. had delivered, and First Lady Laura Bush carried the U.S. view to the Vatican in her meeting with the Pope. Welch said just as telling as the actions of the President and First Lady was the public sentiment in the U.S. on the cartoons. It was significant that only 2-3 U.S. newspapers at most published the photos. Americans clearly did not want anything to do with fanning the flames. The U.S., concluded Welch, believed strongly in freedom of the press, but with freedom there also came responsibility.

#### CONTINUED AID TO PALESTINIANS BUT NOT HAMAS

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¶6. (C) Noting his discussion on Hamas over lunch with MFA Secretary General Lamamra, Welch emphasized the U.S. view

SIPDIS

that Hamas needed to go beyond recognizing Arab League positions on Israel that had come out of the League's Beirut, Tunis, and Algiers summits. Welch said he understood from his earlier meetings that the GOA would at some point have dealings with Hamas following its election victory. When it did, the U.S. strongly hoped Algeria would ask Hamas to recognize Israel, respect the Palestinians' prior agreements with Israel, and renounce violence. These views were shared by the members of the Quartet and by Palestinian Authority President Abbas, emphasized Welch. If Algeria planned to support the Palestinians under a Hamas government, we hoped that support would be channeled directly to the Palestinian people. There was no reason to punish the latter by taking assistance away. In this regard, the U.S. would rechannel previous aid and offer a substantial new Palestinian aid package, but not through the Palestinian government under Hamas. The U.S. asked that Algeria, a solid financial backer of the Palestinians and one of the few countries that had carried out its financial pledges, do the same.

HAMAS NEEDS TO RECOGNIZE PRESENT REALITIES  
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¶7. (C) Bedjaoui said Hamas was obliged to deal with the present realities in the Israel-Palestinian relationship and that respecting Quartet and U.S. conditions, including prior Palestinian agreements with Israel, was part of that reality. Bedjaoui offered that Hamas would respect the conditions but that it would take time. He noted that the Palestinians felt despair and perceived that Israel was intransigent in its positions. Speaking personally, Bedjaoui said it was not possible to go back in time to Oslo and rebuild the relationship. There was no need to lose 10-15 years. Pressure, though, needed to be exerted also on the Israelis so that their intransigence would be overcome. There had been 60 years of war and Hamas needed to be attuned to the conditions it inherits.

¶8. (C) Welch told Bedjaoui acting Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's statements of the previous day were encouraging. His party's platform for the upcoming Israeli elections called for supporting the road map. Olmert said Israel hoped for a Palestinian partner but pledged to do whatever was necessary to protect Israel's security if there was no partner. Welch said he had been encouraged by President Bouteflika's remark in their earlier meeting that he had been at the 1967 Khartoum summit and had strongly supported the

ALGIERS 00000502 003 OF 003

"three no's," but that there was a new situation and he hoped the Khartoum Arab League summit this year would produce "three yes's."

¶9. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this message.

ERDMAN